

Lesley Battler | **Journal** | 1997



Journal archive project

Introduction

As a young reader i was fascinated by diaries, journals, notebooks of all kinds. Perhaps part of that attraction was that they seemed a way of telling your own story, remaking the world as you went on. “They” never have the final say in your journal.

I grew up in a family that was shattered by mental illness and writing in a journal was a discipline and a way of keeping myself together; proof I could build an independent life. I was never big on recording my most intimate feelings or expressing myself. For me, the journal existed to help me let go and move beyond the emotional, interior world. I was so much more interested in recording the flora and fauna of the mundane. Daily life was exotic to me.

From the 1980s and on into the Naughts, I wrote in a journal, which I eventually transcribed into electronic format as a project to keep me occupied during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. At first it felt like a self-indulgent pastime, certainly a little irrelevant considering world-events, but as I continued I started feeling maybe there was some value to the project. I decided to preserve them as archives, format them as PDFs and release them onto the Internet where anyone can search, download and use any of the material for projects of their own.

To me, this journal is really an archive, portrait of an era as seen by one insignificant person. It's the insignificance that is truly key here. I love the archives and records of the invisible lives that accumulate into social zeitgeists. Being a journal, it's hit-and-miss what I wrote about, or had time to write about. Huge chunks of my life never made it to the page while there may be hundreds of words devoted to a movie I enjoyed on a hot summer night. I have not added any narrative arc or changed names to keep the journal as intact as possible.

In such a long time span the journal volumes reveal a generation trying to find their way in the world; me and so many of my friends and acquaintances working contract jobs, going to community colleges to learn vocational skills. Spoiler alert: societal change, turbulence, employment issues, generational conflict were just as strong then as they are now. While transcribing the journals I also became fascinated by the rhythm of daily life, how periods of calm so often erupt into times of intense change.

I have taken the original journals and reformatted them into chronological years that begin in January and end in December, and I have included a synopsis with each one to provide a little context. I preserved as much as possible the style and quirks of the original handwritten journals and only employed some light editing to correct place names, and obvious mis-spellings.

These volumes are meant for anyone who is interested in the 1980s and 1990s, in archives, in the lives of young people trying to find a place in the world, in personal impressions of socio-economic-cultural events. This, of course, includes the introduction of the Internet to our daily lives. Please feel free to browse, reuse, recycle any of this material for your own projects. After all this time I still believe information wants to be free.

Vol. 17, 1997

Today's Mountains – The last human on earth – Corporate cults – Cowboys and bar tabs – Chinook arches – Hello, Dolly! – First drive to Bragg Creek – Another too-close encounter with multi-level marketing – Relocation Part Deux – My first Stampede – I learn that publishing in a literary journal can cause corporate melt-downs – Day trip to the Underworld – First visitors from the east – Death of Princess Diana – Build Your Own Job – First business trip to Eastern Ontario (Spoiler: everything goes wrong).

Jan. 10

Red wine and dinner with Carol at Divino's. Carol is such good company and the best person in the world to talk to about relationships. I often find women her age, early fifties I think, more interesting than people Jennifer's age. Jennifer sees the 1950s as an ideal time of stability and family values. Carol hated the 1950s and was always trying to escape that mind-set. Her laughter is bubbly and girlish but doesn't conceal her intelligence. She is more cultured than I am, goes to the opera, good restaurants, takes weekend trips to Vancouver and spends a lot of time with the urbane Bob Horte from Legal Services. Yet she jokes about how awkward she is around people and some of the dumb things she has said. She may be awkward but she is astute about people and it's so much fun gossiping with her. We both agree that Judy Dunham is our number one suspect for 20th floor axe murderer.

Carol thinks Fred is feeling powerless and threatened by my "new success." He's subconsciously, or not so subconsciously, trying to keep control by undermining me, e.g. criticisms about the house. Her second husband behaved in a similar way about her master's degree in English. He would brag about her education to his friends but use it as a weapon when they were alone.

She has mixed feelings about being a grandmother. She cares deeply about her children and has visited Montréal a couple of time already to be with her daughter Valerie and her new baby. But Carol admits the trips aren't fun and she has mixed feelings about them. There's a nice honesty to Carol. She's often blunt but never bitter or sarcastic. She told me that Greg and Isabel are thinking about moving from Priddis and starting a sheep ranch. Oh dear. This just makes me think of *The Shining*.

**

The view from the 20th floor continues to sustain me. The weather is supposed to change dramatically again tomorrow and this afternoon I caught it in the act of changing. Early today the mountains were visible, pale blue and white, a heavy grey-blue chinook cloud arched over them. Later in the day, a tide of light from the west. The chinook cloud had broken up so there were dabs of grey and white, lines of broken chinook cloud. The mountains had vanished so it looked as if they had never existed. All you could see was light, a radiant veil pulled over the world. It never ceases to amaze me how ephemeral mountains are.

Jan. 22

I take my break in the little coffee shop right at the entrance of the Plus-15 into Gulf Canada Square. I always feel as if I'm waiting in a transit depot.

- A new subdivision clings to the foothills; raw, sepulchral, houses standing in rows like white crypts.

- Sky murky, no mountains today.

- Steve Morris is on the phone repeating his epic struggle with the snow to yet another one of his cronies. He's been in public relations for years. I never thought I would ever meet people like this, much less work with them.

- Mountains have peeped out, the slightest etching against the sky. Whistling across the horizon, now you see them, now you don't, little fissures of pure light in their eggshell surfaces.

Jan. 23

Snow swirling like Van Gogh brushstrokes; delirious, ecstatic. The 20th floor is a maze of workstations, pods. Sometimes an oppressive panopticon, other times an enchanted kingdom. Departments are connected by CS Lewis doors. Entering one of these passages is like going through the wardrobe, one leads to the world of Legal Services, one to BIS.

Our departmental VP, Chris Wendlandt (aka Cement Head), occasionally stumbles into our Communications wonderland, makes a face as if he's come out into the Paris sewer system. The look of relief on his face when he finds the portal to Legal Services is hilarious. Another day up in the clouds. Larry has set up another junk food banquet on the filing cabinets, Dave Jones is ducking, dodging, vaporizing at will, Ian is making strange noises and banging his desk drawers.

Jan. 24

Went to see *The People Vs Larry Flynt* with Carol and Ken Smith, one of those odd CP groups that form when no one can stand being alone and/or not having anything to do for another night. Brutally cold. Snow glinting in the air, streets flayed by wind, people bundled up so it looks as if half their faces have been removed. We had beer and dinner at the Dakotas before the movie. Ken told us stories about insurance appraisals done on some of his "objets d'art" that were damaged during the move. He is possibly the strangest character in our zoo; someone you could only find in a company like CPR. People are always speculating about his sex life. One camp is convinced he's gay; the other thinks he's asexual. Gerry Lafontaine once told me he thought Ken Smith wasn't gay but a misogynist; someone who would beat women. I can see what he means.

Ken is urbane, cultured. He talked in his ponderous, meandering way about his Loetz china and some Lalique crystal that was damaged in the move. He is intelligent and can be humorous if he's not stressed out about his work. He's also a notorious hypochondriac and describes his travails to us, eyes almost tearful, hand on his heart. He is terrible to work with. He gets stressed out very easily and when he's tense he acts as if his back is against the wall. He acts cornered and he will manipulate people, cadge work out of anyone he can, not fulfill promises, break deadlines. His voice becomes sharp and strident. Occasionally he has a cold calculating smile with a hint of cruelty in it that makes me think Gerry may be right.

Ken, Dave, Ian and Ralph have been mates for years. Ken lost his job in Government Affairs and Ralph swooped in and saved him, which is why we're now stuck with him. It seems he's been protected and carried for years, but also teased by everyone in the group. Ken visited Dave this afternoon. Larry popped in and said, "I was looking for a wordsmith not a kensmith." But he was not stressed out tonight and was full of chivalry and bonhomie with Carol and me. The movie was also pretty good. Courtney Love was amazing; intelligent, down-to-earth, expressive, humorous, sexy.

Jan. 25

Woke up feeling like the last human on earth. I could have been on Pluto. Every branch was frosted. Ice fog blurred the street. A crystal world on the verge of shattering. Not a soul in sight, the houses looked evacuated. A distant tree stood as if it had already passed on to the next world and all that was left was its essence.

Took the car out grocery shopping. It's like bronco busting on these roads. The car bounced along roads that must now be twenty-five miles about ground level, strata of packed snow and ice with deep ruts. Approaching a red light I braked and nothing happened. I stomped on the brake pedal but the Queen E II continued moving. I then turned the wheel so I would at least go into the median instead of the car in front of me. Finally I felt the ABS braking system kick back and the car stopped just in time.

**

Met Carol to see a play at the Centre for Performing Arts downtown. Deserted streets, ice crystals in the air, Christmas lights still twinkling in the park. Everything blue, sky, ice, silence. A sci fi world, life on a space station. I have never felt so far away in my life. Carol and I speculated on what Calgary would have been like a century ago and why anyone stayed. Carol and I were both attracted to the play because of its lovely title: *How Dear to Me the Hour when Daylight Dies*. I like the Centre. It's warmer and less pretentious than Place-des-arts. Carol and I pretended we were rich matrons and "partook" of the coffee and desserts before the play.

Goat Island, the performers in the play, got their inspiration from the annual Catholic pilgrimage up a mountainside in Ireland. I expected and hoped that the pilgrimage motif would continue. It seemed promising at first. After buying our tickets we (the audience) were led up back staircases and down corridors into a small dark theatre. We didn't know where we were going and it was like being led through a labyrinth. It did feel like a pilgrimage, some kind of ritual walk with a leader.

In spite of its lyrical title the play was joyless and anti-poetical. Carol and I got the point during the first five minutes. Life is meaningless, corrupt, ritualized, the sum-total of obsessive-compulsive tics. Four characters appeared in prison grey, twitching and making obsessive-compulsive gestures. It was creepy. At one point the song "Que sera sera," sung by Doris Day came on. The audience brightened while the performers remained grim, joyless and obsessed. It was a very effective scene. Also excellent was the actor who continually climbed up and down a chair to the endless tape-loop of a rough old man's voice singing "Jesus's Blood Never Failed Me Yet." An excruciatingly long, sad, solemn passage capturing the endlessness and binding power of repetitive ritual.

I also liked the ending, which was a jerky compulsive dance (more like prison yard calisthenics) to another tape loop, this time a techno-pop trance tune. A drab guy with horn-rimmed glasses is still going through his motions during the show's final moments – a long, slow fade to black.

Carol and I went to the Palliser after the play. A wild walk in the drastic cold, where the buildings stood like empty tombs and everything seemed so desolate you could imagine a shout shattering the city. We talked about men. She's seeing a Mormon named Mike now and is still in touch with Al Thomson. Carol said Gerry Lafontaine has lapsed into a depression since his retirement. He's only interested in his routine and has reached the point where he won't deviate from it. He should have seen the play! When she visited him in Smiths Falls it was as if time stood still. He wants to visit her in Calgary but she isn't sure she wants to see him. Carol is a vibrant, interesting, spirited woman and it seems as if she has already moved on. I am sorry to hear this though as he was a good friend to me at BIS. Carol and I talked so long we closed the Palliser! It was 2 a.m when we called taxis.

Jan. 28

One of the enjoyable – and stabilizing – things about work is shooting the breeze with Jennifer, Mary Helen and Diana Thomas at BIS. Jennifer is twenty-four, a recent library school graduate. She is ambitious and hates being a contract employee. She's blond and looks so young but her voice is deep, mature, commanding. She says she's always been old for her age and she physically matured young. She's intelligent and has a lot of cool, arcane interests: Tarot cards, sci fi, space travel. Today I found out she's fascinated by ancient Egypt. Jennifer talked about how it seems like another world, one that isn't part of this one. Her eyes were shining and she came alive the way she doesn't when she talks about her career as a librarian.

Jennifer admits that she's too cautious to reach out and do the things she dreams about. She said she's always wanted to go to Europe but has put all her money into savings instead and she's too worried about thieves. One of her favourite obsessions is how baby boomers have taken all the jobs, leaving nothing for her generation. I'm a lot older than she is but I have always felt exactly the same way! Working at CPR, full as it is with old farts, doesn't help. I don't think there's any one way of living one's life. Maybe when I'm old and broke and alone with no savings she'll be heading off to Europe and Egypt. These are the kinds of conversations I always end up in with Jennifer.

**

Isabel is restless again. For a while I thought she was going corporate on me, a little full of her own self-importance, curt, sarcastic, deploring the "laxness of Ralph's department." Now she has flipped back to her counter-culture persona, and is madly in lust with John Timmins again. This seems to be a pattern. When her lust for John is aroused she gets restless, rebellious, hates her job, wants to go the Cowboys and drag shows. I prefer this side of Isabel.

Carol and I had a good talk about her while we were closing down the Palliser. Carol has always noticed a strong corporate side to Isabel, as well as her counter-culture side and that you never know which side you're going to get from one day to the next. Whichever way it goes Isabel takes a hard line position. Very black and white in her views.

**

Lunch meeting: Ralph and his cult; Judy Dunham, Carol with Cement Head, assistant VP of Government and Public Affairs. Irritating having to spend lunch indoors, especially with a crazy chinook wind outside stripping everything to the bone. The streets are actually gleaming wet. Experiencing a chinook is like being inside *The Starry Night*, feeling the delirious brush strokes. We gathered on the 7th floor where our meeting room was supposed to be, only to discover all the rooms had been double-booked. We wandered around like a tribe of nomads, business Bedouins, from room to room bearing platters of sandwiches, desserts, etc. We settled in an empty room for a while and before we had half eaten our lunches another, more powerful group claimed the room. This meant picking everything up, re-wrapping the sandwiches and sushi and moving to Kicking Horse Pass cafeteria, where we had to set up again. I lost my sushi during this last great migration.

Ken Smith then decided he had to take a platter of sandwiches to BIS and he disappeared. Judy went with him. Ralph then disappeared, leaving a ragtag bunch. Carol said, "Six characters in search of a play." We joked about great moments in communications. Finally we found an unoccupied conference room. Ralph, our director, still hadn't returned and Peta gamely started the meeting.

IMHO Chris Wendlandt (Cement Head) is one of the stupidest people I've ever come across. Not only does he not know anything about our department, or who's in it, he's proud of it. He doesn't know why G&PA is stuck with a communications department (a bunch of nutbuckets like us) and that is exactly how he treats us. His questions were ignorant. "What's Employee Communications? What's Internal Communications?" He seems proud of his ignorance, doesn't support us and wants not part of our group. His attitude is made clear through his tone of voice and facial expressions. The tone is, "I don't know what you do and I don't care either, am I not a naughty boy." Cement Head indeed.

Interesting looking at all of the people at the meeting. Dave looks like some kind of icon. His features look carved, chiseled. There's also something totemic about his kind of quietness. Carol has a long face that is vivid and expressive. Her eyes are luminous. She often looks tired, shadows around her eyes. Yet the shadows, hollows and lines add character and a real beauty. She has one of the most interesting faces I know.

Peta sat straight-backed with her hands folded. Eager, bright-eyed, keen to participate. I have a feeling her face is much more expressive than she'd like it to be. Her smile often tightens and sometimes, especially around Ralph, she looks alarmed and sits in a self-protective posture. When the lunch room arrangements were screwed up her face was burning because she had been involved in the organization. The double-booking is not her fault, though.

**

Finally, out into the chinook. I could see the cloud arching over the mountains, a long dark dense grey-blue. It moves like a long low aircraft, drifting. The temperature went from -20 to +8, melting everything in sight, razing the streets, yards, stripping everything to the bone. I feel chinooks in my body, as if the whole world is being tilted. Chinooks seem to bring a form of amnesia in their wake too. They remove all memory of winter. It's almost impossible to remember it was -40 last Saturday. It seems as if last weekend occurred twenty years ago.

Jan. 31

Went to Cowboy's with Isabel, Jennifer and Mary Helen after work. According to Ralph. It turns into a meat market at night, but was full of the head office when we arrived. Rob Girling was there with some of his Strategy Planning colleagues. Cowboy's is located in one of those gutted cavernous buildings that pass for old in Calgary. These buildings are renovated so they look like barns and every sound echoes in the space. This building in particular looks like an exhibition/fairground building. The music was very loud top 40, lite country, Kiss 96 fare. The lighting turned everyone's white clothing phosphorescent. It was luminous, eerie, like playing a game of Green Ghost. The servers all had little strips of white on their butts and they constantly came by with trays of shooters.

Got to know Jennifer a little better. She is so security conscious she wouldn't let go of her bag the entire evening. She likes 80s music and used to be a Durannie (big Duran Duran fan). Also a big Michael Jackson fan during his *Thriller* days. She's a lot of fun when she's enthusiastic about something.

She's been reading books about ex-nuns, not because she's religious per se, but because like me she is fascinated by the idea of leaving the cloister and entering the secular world. Jennifer and I connect on a lot of arcane subjects. At one point I said, "Sometimes I think I'm a space alien" and Jennifer replied, "I *know* I am."

Mary Helen is the opposite. She always seems to be on an even keel. She is originally from Cape Breton but has lived in Calgary for a long time. She is a lot of fun, in a more relaxed easy-going way than Jennifer. She also seems to know everyone in town. Isabel and I admired the way she worked the room. We left Cowboy's and Jennifer decided to go home, grumbling about unsafe streets. She has recently moved out of her parents' house and is living in an apartment with a friend, near 17th Ave. It's been fun hearing her accounts of the room-mate life.

Isabel, Mary Helen and I went on to the Palliser and entered a scene that couldn't possibly be more different from Cowboy's. While we stood in the lobby, people entered, dressed in costumes from New France – bodices, breeches, laced boots, velveteen jackets, powdered wigs. Mary Helen found out it was a Nova Scotia society club called the Order of Good Cheer, billed as Canada's oldest social club. She managed to wrangle three free tickets for us. We mingled with the courtiers and watched a bagpipe procession. Mary Helen seemed to know everyone there. At one point they played OMC's "How Bizarre." Isabel and I looked at each other; we had to dance to that one. Another bizarre night in Calgary. Only here would I end up in a high society Maritimes social club at the Palliser Hotel after being in a honky-tonk. It seems as if I spend an awful lot of time in taxis going home from the Palliser.

Feb. 7

Ralph has some good qualities as a manager. If you have a good idea he will approve it and back you. It doesn't take him a hundred years to get back to you. He let Creative Services attend an all-day design and exhibit conference at the Glenbow museum. Exhibit design is more directly related to the graphics group but Ralph thought it could be relevant to me, as I do a lot of copy work with Peta and Larry. I heard several speakers and took some notes.

– In theatres, audiences are stationary while ideas are moved around them. Museums are the opposite. There people are moving and taking their impressions, meaning and connections they're making with them.

– Theatre design relies on artifice, convention, mental selection. To a large extent set design determines the movement of characters, gives palpable cues to the audience. One of the biggest is nostalgia. At the theatre, audiences are enticed by their own curiosity, and these invisible but strong cues. Theatre audiences work on anticipation, their own senses of what should be, their own experience of, say, a haunted house, filling in for what is not actually on the stage.

– A good display incorporates the elements of the subject into its presentation. Content influences convention.

– Someone from the audience asked about museums and accessibility, how much museums should be made responsible for making “their” material accessible to the cultures the exhibit is claiming to represent. For example, one museum mounted an exhibition on a First Nation's group. The artifacts were stored in a back room where they weren't allowed to enter. This group was denied access to their own culture and heritage. The museum is not owned or curated by any First Nations people. Colonization. Question of ownership.

– Interactive exhibits should help people interact together with the exhibit only playing the role of facilitator. Interactivity tends to lapse into a one-on-one mindset: person manipulating a machine. These exhibits too often fail in helping people explore and seek out their own answers.

– Museums, with the help of the most current technology, fall into the trap of passively providing rote answers to conventional, “normal” questions.

– Museums are in the “interpretation business.” They put artifacts together, connect them and create a story. The object is given a value extending beyond its extrinsic worth. The part it plays in the story makes it more valuable. Story, narrative, editing, reconstruction – not “reality.”

– Also time as context. Some objects have value only in their context to a historical event, e.g, moon rocks, pieces of the Berlin wall.

**

After the conference I went on to the premiere of the video, *The Year That Was*, held in the Kicking Horse lunchroom. Odd gathering: our group, Welcome Centre gang, sundry people from the real estate department for some reason, and others I didn't know. Ralph managed to provide a bar. This was the same video they showed at the CPR Christmas party and I had no idea why we were seeing it again. Talked with Isabel, Judith Nefsky, Ian and Ian's brother. Some serious drinking. One woman had drunk so much she was sick out on the terrace. I was really impressed by Ian's patience with her. Isabel and I ended up in a strange conversation with Bob McAlinden from Administration. He looks like a serious barfly. He was drunk and told Isabel and me that we look like sisters, then added we were both "very attractive."

Went on to the Dakotas with Isabel, Judith and Peta because she needed a ride from Isabel. While there, Steve O'Connor chewed me out for being a snob. I barely know Steve O'Connor and I don't work with him. Ian defended me and said, "Lesley? No ... no way. Steve, you're way off."

Judith Nefsky was still up for some night life so Steve and Judith, Ian's brother and I continued bar-hopping. Ian's brother and I talked about Yellowknife. He lived there for a few years and is moving to Calgary. Judith and Steve were arm-in-arm. Steve looks as if he started at CP right out of high school. He works in the distribution room, plays Rock 107 and wears jeans in spite of the dress code edict. Judith is tall and thin; everything about her is pointy. She looks like a New England Puritan, except for her bushy dark hair. Today she looked very cool and stylish. She approached the evening like an anthropologist, analyzing everything around her.

The line-up was too long at Cowboys so we stopped in at Smiles, but it was dead. We walked down to 11th Ave and ended up in a place called Gargoyles; very surreal late at night. Inside was a huge winding staircase like the one Norma Desmond swept down in *Sunset Boulevard*.

Cavernous walls, a huge gilt mirror on the staircase landing added to the Goth-Film Noir ambience. I had expected to see Goths, people into the vampire scene, or even Norma Desmond-like cross-dressers. No such luck. They were playing 1970s disco, though, and that was fun. Judith enjoyed herself. But what a strange night and what strange company. But then, strange has become my status quo.

Feb. 13

Fred gave McGill his official letter of resignation. He was originally going to take a leave of absence but decided to quit and collect UIC until he moves to Calgary in April. This is a big deal for both of us. The news has hit me hard. It means he is coming to Calgary and I'm not sure how I feel about that. It also removes my last big connection with Montréal. I still have a lot of feeling about McGill and it feels as if I am being cut away from my friends and the community I always had even after leaving for CP.

I think leaving McGill is the right decision. The university is sinking. They're doing sleazy stunts for money yet no one seems to know where the money is going. Not to the libraries, not to infrastructure, building maintenance or groundskeeping. I suspect the money is all being plowed into giant salaries for administrative positions no one has ever needed. The best people are leaving. It's time for Fred to leave too, and this is the obvious opportunity.

No more McGillot, trolls, Rumpelstiltskins, rare book departments flooding out, ice avalanches, permafrost on the McLennan steps. No more snoozing at meetings under giant portraits of James McGill, no more Five Year Plans, endless litigation, CIA experiments in the attics, physical plant rapists, joke security, rocket scientists in pay roll, pay roll clerks in rocket science research, innumerate accountants, rugs too toxic to harbour cockroaches.

Yet there's the lovely campus, this jewelled isle in the middle of downtown Montréal (this McGill!). There is the home I had at Howard Ross, my friends, the 6th floor, the access I kept to the library, its closeness and familiarity. This seems like a rite-of-passage and I'm feeling surprisingly sentimental about it. Silly, because as an institution it was not very good to me. Too many people are growing old before their time there, or stewing in corrosive cynicism. No more "Little Mother with Claws."

Feb. 18

This is the strangest job I've ever had in my life. I'm living in air, a silhouette in this rarefied and isolated environment. I enter a shining lobby, press a button and take wing to the 20th floor. The Plus 15s add to this feeling of having my head in the clouds. Staying afloat in a city where the ground seems reserved for the homeless. Five days a week I'm intellectual capital for a corporation and my life is guarded by security for the eight or so hours I'm in the office. When work ends I descend and am ejected to the ground level. A soap bubble life. I come in, pretend to do fake work, teleport from one level to the next. I take coffee breaks in this one café so I can look out on the street, as if missing a morning there, the world, the street, the earth itself will become a distant memory.

Cement Head called to officially inform me of my bonus. In theory, I'm not entitled to one because I haven't worked in the department for a year. I got it for my Clear the Track railway safety rap song, the one I knocked off in the café one afternoon. Apparently it won an award. How does one stay centered or honest around here?

Feb. 24

"Adult Mammal Cloned Successfully." Today's Globe & Mail. Scientists managed to clone a sheep after first believing it was impossible. Brave new world! This gives me the same kind of chill as the Berlin Wall coming down, the masses of people in Wenceslas Square. Nothing lasts forever. What you've grown up with, what you've always known, the very fabric of your life can be pulled away in a day. This is one of these bottomless events I never thought I'd live to see.

At work, no one mentioned it except Jennifer. We talked for ages about Dolly the sheep and all the socio-ethical-biological consequences this will have. The genie's out of the bottle now. Who will stop or even be able to control genetics experiments? No law covers cloning.. Jennifer and I speculated on what would happen if we were cloned and our clones were raised in completely different environments from us. Would my clone be rich, popular, successful? Would I be jealous of my own clone if it turns out that it's all about nurture?

Which humans would we choose to clone? What would happen to our world perspective, not to mention our social foundation if there were humans and clones, separate but equal? How would humans try to dominate and what if they couldn't? Would there be a schism between those who were "born" and those who were "clone?" The questions go on and on and on.

The clone was created (born?) in Scotland at the Roslin Institute, using DNA from an adult sheep. Dr Wilmott took a cell from an adult sheep and prepared its DNA so it would be accepted by an egg from another sheep. He then removed the egg's own DNA from the adult sheep by fusing the egg with an adult cell. The fused cells, carrying the adult DNA, began to grow and divide like a normal fertilized egg to form an embryo. In July the ewe gave birth to a lamb, named Dolly. DNA tests show she is the clone of the adult ewe who supplied her DNA.

Jennifer and I think this is huge, fascinating, spine-tingling news. Yet no one has breathed a word about it. Although it's front page news it feels like something pulled off an Internet conspiracy site. Cloning is mainstream news now. Just imagine the corrupt, impoverished countries only too willing to harbour experimental camps run by amoral researchers, scientists, doctors. Maybe I should go back to school and major in bioethics or genetic law. That's work for the millennium!

Feb. 26

I need to find a life outside of work here and decided to attend a meeting of the Calgary Writer's Association. It was held at the Good Companions Centre in the southwest, 19th Ave and 26 St. Since I was early I roamed around the neighbourhood. It's in flux, a pastiche of the old and new. The age and style of the houses vary from property to property. Tiny European principalities stitched together to form a region, customs and topography changing drastically at each border. Infills and boomtown growth moving in to dominate and supplant the old; micro-colonialism.

The listing I had seen for the Writers Association was in *Avenue* magazine, a glossy, upscale publication. This led me to expect a group of literary muckety-mucks, and I feared I might have to bring in my thesis to prove I could actually write something. Instead, the Good Companions Centre is actually a centre for senior citizens and the association turned out to be yet another community-volunteer-free enterprise group. The meeting room looked and smelled like a church basement and most of the people must have been fifty and over.

It was a feedback night (workshop) for them and I felt welcome. One woman read a good story based on her Danish childhood. A woman named Katherine spoke out *against* Ralph Klein. Smell of church coffee, school table and chairs, display case full of crafts and knitted items for grandchildren. A down-to-earth ambience I could really appreciate today. Conversation was really interesting, stimulating. We talked about cloning, Schindler's List, the Holocaust. One woman, Marg Gilkes, was the first police woman in Alberta, in the 1940s. She has piercing blue eyes and a "police" way of looking at the world. Her hawk eyes scan you as if you were standing in a police lineup. She has published a book about her experiences called *Ladies of the Evening*. She was also in Germany with the Red Cross when the camps were open. I enjoyed the evening but it took me three hours to get home by bus.

March 4

Ken Smith threw himself a fiftieth birthday party. He has also hit the twenty-five year mark at CPR. He gave out formal invitations to sixteen of us, including me. Ken and I have never once worked together but he thinks I'm a "good person" and he asked one day how I was able to keep my "good spirit." We went to his favourite restaurant, La Chaumière. I found it a curious place. Entering, it reminded me of a church, a kind of minimal generic Catholic church. We had a room reserved and it looked more like a conference room at the Palliser than a restaurant. I had trouble remembering it was a party and not a business meeting. The usual suspects all present: Ralph and Anne, Dave and Erika, Ian and Jennifer, Isabel, Carol, Bob Horte, John Timmins. I sat beside Isabel, who was directly across from John. This made for much heated whispering between Isabel and me.

The party eventually broke up. Isabel and Carol left and I was about to leave as well when Ralph summoned me over. Into the hot seat, as it turned out. Dave, Erika, Ian and Jennifer remained at the end of the table. Jennifer came up to me and whispered that there was a place reserved for me with them. I was both touched and surprised. I eventually realized they were supporting/rescuing me after my first encounter with Ralph. Then an extremely drunk Ken Smith pulled up a chair beside Ralph and me. He sloshed around in his chair and was surprisingly whimsical and humorous. He called me his "little lamb" until Ralph shooed him away.

Ralph demanded to know what Isabel and I were talking about. He claimed we were laughing at him during the dinner. I couldn't exactly tell him that we were talking about how much she wanted to fuck John. Ralph was the last thing on either of our minds but that didn't seem like a wise thing to say. It was impossible to answer this. There are treacherous reefs and whirlpools in him. Then there's his paranoid side.

He asked me point-blank why I'm afraid of him. See above. But I couldn't exactly tell him this. I also wasn't going to deny the fact that I'm afraid of him. Partially because I don't want him being able to hold that over me. It's better to admit it and keep it out in the open. I am afraid of his mood swings and the nasty side of his character. I'm afraid of his volatility and how I find it extremely difficult to gauge when he's joking and when he's dead serious. He plays mind games and confronting me with these questions is a prime example. So that is why I'm afraid of him and yes, I do go out of my way to avoid him. I've been through this kind of thing before, on a much less dangerous level, with my old enemy, Lynne Murphy. There's no way to play this. I just told Ralph I didn't know why I was scared of him. "Just shy I guess," I said. "I'm used to working in libraries."

Then he switched gears and asked me why I was unhappy and what he could do about it. I wish I could have trusted him, believed this was a straight question and could answer honestly. I said nothing about Fred or homesickness and just said I didn't feel I had much of a purpose at work. I emphasized there was nothing personal. Then Ralph puffed up, just like Boris, in full managerial display. "Do you know why I hired you?" he said. I lived dangerously and said, "Not really. I wrote an article that won an award I didn't know existed. That is all I know."

"I only hire brilliant staff," he said. He pointed at Ken Smith who was a puddle at this time. "He's completely nuts but he's brilliant." Then Ralph pointed at Ian. "When Ian first started he was quiet and mousy and look at him now." On to Isabel. "Isabel's bright," he said. "But she'll never be able to do anything more than she's doing. You're a brilliant writer, I could see that." Then he reminded me that I couldn't quit and leave Calgary because Fred hadn't even moved out yet and didn't seem very anxious about coming. That struck pay dirt. That was Ralph's hook into me, the thing he could hold over me. I don't care about losing this job and I don't care about a career in corporate communications. Promising me anything in that area has no effect on me. I'm not a Lucy Payette who wants a communications career and wants to write. I certainly don't need to work at the CPR to write, and the word "brilliant" is pretty meaningless in this group. But he got to me: Fred.

I was in a pensive mood when I joined the group. They had reserved a place for me and I slipped into it as if I had undergone an initiation rite. They circled their wagons around me, supportive, sympathetic, disturbingly like an alliance of siblings trapped in a dysfunctional family. Jennifer (Ian's partner) told me not to take anything Ralph said personally. He plays mind games all the time and he's done it to Ian for years. He promised her he'd pull out all the stops to help her find a job in Calgary. That never happened. I really like Jennifer. She's the most open and honest; the truth-teller in the group. The least bound or silenced by the department or company in general.

Dave said Ralph had called him over earlier and claimed that he, Ralph, could "shit out the News" in half the time it took Dave. He said Ralph is always using parties to get something to hold over people. Ian said when he first started, Ralph took him out to dinner at an expensive place. Ralph disappeared and stuck Ian with the tab. This kind of thing has been going on for years.

We went to a bar and I felt I was now a baptized member of the group. Meanwhile, Ken Smith had become cosmic. He lay down on the seat of the booth with his head in Jennifer's lap, then sloshed between us, putting his arms around us, swaying. He pointed to Dave, Erika, Ian and Jennifer and said, "You're all such good people. You're good and you're good and you're good ..." and when he got to me he said, "and you're *excellent*."

I found out that the bar tab for this little soirée was 1500\$. I did not pay for this.

March 14

Dave took me out to lunch today to come up with a strategy for dealing with Ralph. He told me all kinds of Ralph stories and said they've ended up in fist fights in the past. He said Ralph is a shady character, lives in a fantasy world and has a strong paranoid streak. It also bothers him a lot that Anne is so much more successful than he is. Ralph is always comparing himself to people like Fred Green. "Ralph doesn't have employees – he has a gang."

Ralph certainly plays people against each other. He's told me a few times now that I'm supposed to keep an eye on Jones. I found out today that he told Dave he was supposed to discipline me. Ralph (a director at a railway company) is in court today due to brawling with some Indigenous people, and I need discipline? Dave also told me the Ralph had Lucy Payette in tears at least once a week. I will never cry in front of Ralph Wilson. But wow. Why can't I ever get normal jobs? My first real professional job and it's this.

March 15-16

Peta invited me to see Garnet Rogers and spend the night with her and Doug at Bragg Creek. I was afraid of driving the car out there in winter but I decided I really wanted to do it. I turned the engine on then decided I needed to scrape more ice off the windshield. I left the car idling, thinking it could defrost while I was scraping. The battery went dead. I wasn't a CAA member yet and ended up calling City Wide Towing. The guy arrived promptly and boosted me. He told me not to leave the car idling and that it should be taken out for longer drives. A drive to Bragg Creek was just what it needed. Idling is bad but driving is good. Idling doesn't create the right kind of friction that keeps the engine parts limber and able to work. Idling just wears everything down. So I learned something today.

Made it to Bragg Creek. The worst part of the drive was changing lanes on the Glenmore West and getting on to Highway 8. I remembered the stop sign, T-intersection, the long road to Forestry Lane and the orange "Slow Down" sign. Steered the mothership up Peta's long driveway. So it seems I am now a corporate professional homeowner at the wheel of a car the size of the Titanic surrounded by the Rocky Mountains.

Met some of Peta's neighbours, went for dinner at a little German restaurant, then on to the concert, which was held in a tiny community hall that reminded me of the show *Northern Exposure*. The room was set up with folding chairs and I could have been at a town council meeting in Cicely Alaska. Isabel and Greg joined us. The stand-off between Greg and Coral continues making Isabel very tense.

Garnet took the stage with his collection of guitars. He's a tall, fair man with a ponytail and loves playing these intimate venues. He is Stan Rogers's brother and he's been trying to get out of his brother's shadow. I got the feeling from one of his songs that Stan had a domineering personality and could be very difficult. Garnet interspersed folk songs with some more electronic pieces. I thought those pieces were his most interesting. During intermission, Garnet hung around with the audience, blending in with those who had come to see him. We were able to ask him about his guitars.

Spent the night with Peta and Doug in their lovely chalet-style house. It is beautiful and Doug did all the renovations. Next morning was warm and lovely. Went with Peta to walk her dog and later went cross-country skiing with her and Doug in the Kananaskis. It was exhilarating, surfing down snowy crests, following the shining path through the evergreens. Even falling felt wonderful, cold clear snow on my face, just like being a little kid. I went skiing, I broke a big driving fear by driving out to Peta's in winter conditions, I even coped with a Car Problem. Truly a wonderful weekend.

March 17

Group birthday celebration for Ralph and Anne, Charles Strachey and Debbie-Lyne held at Buzzards. I was pleased to see the Welcome Centre gang. John Timmins strolled in, a disjointed combination of whimsy and arrogance, helplessness and self-assurance. I really like Charles Strachey. He's a public relations student at Mount Royal College and was recruited to work at the Centre. He's honest, sincere and sensitive. He is doing a work placement in our department and is touchingly anxious to learn and do a good job. Eventually gifts were presented and the cake brought out.

Ralph summoned me. Another weird encounter. He was in one of his paranoid moods and demanded, “Where are Jones and La Couvée.” I said I didn’t know, which was the truth. They come and go as they please and I spend most of my time with Peta, Larry and Rick in Graphics. “That’s all you ever say,” snapped Ralph. “You must know. You’re in that corner, you see them every day. You’re supposed to be keeping an eye on Jones.” He was getting worked up but I just stared at him. He must have realized it wasn’t wise to continue down that road because he abruptly thanked me for coming and left with Anne. Everyone wonders how Anne can stand him, much less live with him.

I lingered for a while with Debbie-Lyne, who was there with both her ex-husbands. Mike Kieran of “Alouette” fame gave me a ride home. We talked about Calgary morning radio shows.

March 20

To the Palliser with Carol and Isabel to celebrate Isabel’s birthday, which was March 18. While walking to the Palliser, only a few blocks from GCS, we noticed an ominous cloud in the northeast, very dense, brown-grey, casting the city in an ominous light. Isabel has serious problems with Dennis Apedaile, assistant VP of Government Affairs. He hates her and Carol is always trying to mediate between them. He complained about Isabel in a long, anally-retentive memo to Carol, pointing out all of Isabel’s spelling and grammar mistakes on *Inside Track*. Isabel responded to the memo in a very sarcastic way. Apedaile was incensed and Carol has been trying to smooth it over. On the other hand, Isabel is having personal/professional problems with Carol. She thinks Carol has become very needy and demanding. All in all, an odd birthday celebration.

April 15

Last night Syd Moran came over to read the meter. Even these days this isn't a noteworthy event but for some reason we started talking about relocation and the job situation. He immediately tapped into the insecurity surrounding my job and remarked on how I could be laid off at any time and this is the reality of today's job market. He's been through it. He's a Phys Ed major and worked as a corporate fitness trainer. Like so many other Calgarians he was laid off and now works two jobs. His second job is with a distribution company and he invited me to a share-holders meeting. It sounded odd but why not go?

The company is called Britt Worldwide and seemed shady to me but Syd arrived punctually at the door, dressed in a suit, looking like an old-fashioned date, clean behind the ears, gawky and sincere. He's a nice guy, early forties but a throwback to the 1950s. He opened the car door for me and we talked some more about jobs and the economy on the way to the meeting. I was certain he's a born-again christian because of the language he used when talking about jobs. "Everyone is searching for something," he repeated many times. "This company is the answer for me."

I recognized him from my christian youth group days; his earnestness, eagerness to agree, moderate, find similarities between himself and other people. I found him rather refreshing compared to the ambiguity, cynicism and general weirdness at work. We reached the Red & White Club and the parking lot was full. This was a huge meeting. Britt Worldwide is a network distribution company and was founded in 1959. It is global, with a presence in over seventy countries. I had never heard of it before today.

It was a combination business meeting and Billy Graham crusade with the same people who go to revivals hoping for miracles, of finding a way of pulling themselves out of the murk of their lives, clean and hopeful, supplicants in business suits. A lot of slick hair, poofy perms and real estate outfits. Just a little off, too-brassy buttons, makeovers a little too fresh – fantasies of success. There seems to be a very set image of what a successful person looks like. Syd guided me, introduced me to everyone he knew in the room. He was very solicitous and it felt very much as if I was being recruited. He acted like a sponsor in an evangelical group leading someone "on the way" to Christ.

The speaker was of the motivational variety, full of positive thinking, building up the typical narrative; he was a lowly wretch, a loser, a wreck of a human being until he discovered the Business. He continually pointed out how he had only been a lowly construction contractor “doing drywall and now wearing two hundred dollar suits.” Odd how his entire speech centered around attacking his own working class occupation and roots. He incited himself with his own eloquence and he preened and pranced back and forth practically foaming at the mouth: Cars \$100,000 ... 26,000 ... Be a Winner ... Swim Upstream When Everyone Else is Swimming Downstream. The whole “meeting” was a consumer rave.

The audience sat on their pews, wanting to be true believers, wanting their share of the true cross. Who doesn’t feel like a loser compared to someone else, especially in the hierarchical societies humans build for themselves? And employment itself has become evangelical; employees as supplicants in large organizations where they only have an illusion of personal control. That’s where companies and prosperity movements get you. The audience was also part of the performance. Dressed in business drag, facial expressions ranging from mild skepticism to outright worship, many on the verge of rushing to the altar to be saved, to Make Lots of Money, to Be Secure For Life, safe from the vagaries of fortune. We wouldn’t want any vagaries in this room!

Also like evangelical christianity there was a strong siege mentality. The speaker talked a lot about kids and family values but also mentioned losing friends by getting into the Business. He felt he had to keep the Business a secret. This made me extremely curious. Why would someone worry about his reputation if this was such a great business. He also talked a lot about lifestyle change, personal transformation; a seamless melding of business and evangelism. I started wondering if Britt Worldwide was a large pyramid scheme or even a cult. Eventually Amway was mentioned. Turns out that Britt Worldwide is a distributor for Amway products and Amway has strong connections with christian fundamentalists in the US. After the meeting I told Syd it wasn’t for me. He was disappointed (because he needs to recruit his quota of souls for heaven) but we shook hands and went our separate ways.

April 23

Ralph invited Dave, Erika and me to come over to his house to watch the hockey game. I wondered if this was a ploy to get Dave and me together to abuse us. Left work with Dave. Took a taxi to his house to pick up Erika. They have a lovely old house in Inglewood, which they are renovating. It is like them, very stylish, full of history and antiques, so much more originality and character than Ralph and Anne's sterile palace in the corporate ghetto.

Ralph was normal tonight and we hung out, drank beer, ate Ralph's homemade pizza, which was very good. He occasionally wallowed in self-pity but nothing weird or nasty. I discovered he was once an actor. There was a photo of him in a play that just happened to be lying on the table for anyone to see. There is something of the failed actor about Ralph. I wonder how he ended up as a corporate communications manager. Later, John Timmins arrived.

While we watched *Law and Order*, John disappeared into a little room that reminds me of a funeral parlour and played the organ, sounding like the Phantom of the Opera, adding a weird Gothic atmosphere to both *Law and Order* and this ridiculously large house. I started brewing a story set in a suburb where a John Timmins-like character breaks into these houses and plays strange Gothic music just to unnerve the people living in their empty executive fortresses. At one point Ralph bellowed at John to stop the racket. John ignored him and played on while Ralph shrugged.

April 26

Drove to Priddis to visit Isabel. CKUA played an old Wings song, "Famous Groupies," a song I haven't heard in years. I turned it up, rolled down the window and headed for the Rockies, feeling as excited and adventurous as I had felt down and out on Thursday. Got to actually spend some time with Isabel. We went for a long walk in the woods.

Her family life is so complicated and tense. Greg's ex-wife is hitting him with extra alimony demands because his oldest daughter wants to go to camp in Israel. Being unemployed really bothers him and he is filling in the grant proposal for the sheep farming venture. Coral doesn't want to move to a sheep ranch and says it's "too primitive." I'm with Coral on that issue!

Greg and Coral are still fighting and it's tearing Isabel apart. Greg doesn't understand her and probably puts too much stock in keeping up appearances and being socially correct. On the other hand, Coral can seem very rude because she has a hearing problem and doesn't relate well to other people. Greg can't deal with that. Isabel feels she is caught in the middle.

Isabel and Greg are getting married tomorrow. I worry about Isabel, almost a sense of foreboding, in this intense, powder keg configuration, isolated out in the country like this. Under a big grey sky the house seemed so makeshift, the clutter of toys, unfinished projects. Precarious. A sense they're just barely holding things together. Greg's daughters were here this weekend and they looked a little lost. This is not a forgiving day and the sheep farm seems like a disaster.

April 29

Long phone conversation with Marsha. It was emotional. I miss her so much and I cried a few times while talking to her. It's been a long time since I've been able to let myself do that. She's having problems with John, the way he won't express his feelings and how he's not doing anything about his job. He was offered a position in Kitchener and turned it down because he won't leave Kingston, even though any job he gets in Kingston will be worse than what he has now. According to her, their relationship and lives have stagnated. At one point we reminisced over skipping rope games and the red white and blue rubber balls. I've been stripped of my feelings and my past out here and Marsha brought them back tonight.

April 30

Marsha's presence with me all day. Our conversation brought my blighted emotions back to life and I welcome them, painful thought they are. One can't live forever in limbo, a state of numbness.

This evening, everything's conspiring to make me feel like I'm eighteen again, the low light planing across the city. Young women pass, swinging gold-clasped briefcases, in full dress-for-success drag, secretaries tapping out Morse code in stiletto heels, lanky Maritimers in jeans and Stetsons, businessmen labouring up the sidewalks as if they were Maoists on the Long March. I could be twenty years old heading into a foreign city for love. Or maybe the perfect job, the once causing me to stop in the middle of the street, tossing my beret in the air and thinking, "you might just make it after all."

Or I could be with Fred again, twenty year-olds just starting out, taking our first walk together. What every fool wants: To be twenty for a second time. Tonight, just one night I'd like to keep loss at bay, to be able to enjoy the moment, no ambiguity, no sadness, no nostalgia, no sense that I've made the biggest mistake of my life, to keep the years from drowning me.

In the World News store tabloid headlines blare: "Mother Gives Birth to Alien Child"; "Wild Child Lives in 'Trees.'" Everyone is just like me, longing for miracles, harbouring the hope that goes against the odds, wanting to believe in a purpose, in synchronicity, that the natural order can be broken, that free will finally crushes determinism, the inevitable can be turned back and the last page will say, "Happily Ever After."

Tonight my heart has been unlocked and I could drown in the tinder-dry air, right in front of the Golden Dragon shipping centre. Tears I haven't dared shed in six months, memories I can't re-live, feelings I have to shuck if I want to keep moving at all. There is no Montréal, no marriage, no house, McGill, library jobs and if I were really twenty I wouldn't be missing them. But there is still Marsha. A skin has dropped off, exposing something tiny, achingly green, somehow left unblighted by the long cold winter.

May 9

Relocation, Part Deux. Fred is coming on May 22, Boris and Natasha arriving today by air cargo. My babies will soon be here. For weeks I heard nothing definite from Fred – not dates or schedules. All of a sudden he found a sub-letter for his apartment. His mother has a friend who is a travel agent and she arranged for Boris and Natasha to fly out on Air Canada. I have spent the last few days running around getting food, litter, litter box and cat-proofing the house.

Drove out to the airport and mercifully didn't have to drive into the terminal parking nightmare. Air Cargo is a couple of kms away from the airport. I arrived early and sat outside, cross-legged, stunned by the view. Nothing around me except for the rolling land, bronze fields, distant mountains, sky pearly in the west, sombre in the south, misty in the north, sharp in the east, a smoky quality in the centre, planes glinting into the air. Here I felt the utter immensity of the cosmos. You could feel or imagine anything in this vast space. If I spoke my voice would resonate, sound echoing into the past and future. It's a land where dinosaurs could browse, silhouetted against the light. Or a ship, a pin-point in infinity. Beyond this point are roaring tides, snow, fog, gales, drifting packs of ice islands. Sun, moon, stars hidden beyond this stark empty quarter of the globe.

There are no maps here; there is no map in my head. I don't know if I'll ever regain my memory, my sense of countries, sanctuaries, homes. This is terra incognita, the country which has not been discovered and has no name, lying beyond compass, astrolabe. I may be ten leagues off course, fifty, one hundred. That was then; this is now and there is a gulf between them. Another plane vanishes into the sky.

The air cargo guy brought out the carrier. Boris and Natasha were sedated but awake, soft little noses pressed against the grill, eyes wide. I almost cried. The guy told me pets are transported from everywhere in the world and he had delivered a cat from Singapore earlier today. Drove Boris and Natasha back into town via Centre Street-downtown-Macleod Trail. Changing lanes and making the right exits on Calgary's "trails" still frighten me.

I inched my way down Centre over the bridge, past the stone lions, sun setting over the Bow River, then into the downtown and the home stretch. Boris and Natasha were in good health and seem to have received the right dose of tranquilizer. Fred told me Dr Banon gave them the shots. They are disoriented but otherwise safe and sound, exploring every nook and cranny of their new home.

May 22-23

Fred's arrival; my three hour drive to Edmonton. In preparation I took the Mothership to Kirkham garage for a spring check-up and learned the front tires were a "whisker away from separating." Rob Kirkham pointed out the steel showing through the rubber. Garages are a new world to me. There's a counter, cash register, receptionist, items for sale. Open hoods, mechanics huddled over engines, cars on blocks like patients in hospital beds. Mechanics coming and going, wearing smocks like doctors, the receptionist possessing only partial knowledge of their mysterious ways.

People wait as uncomfortably in the garage as they do in the emergency ward, sitting as if ready to spring into action at any second, feeling they should be doing something, unable to accept that their car is beyond their control now. Every so often people venture into the garage itself, as if entering the operating room, looking, as if they could possibly inspect and evaluate the car with its internal organs exposed. I nodded and said "ah" a lot. Although I'm an obvious newbie (and a woman) I was not patronized and I actually enjoyed going to the garage.

The Mothership was ready. I washed the windshield, scrubbed the pollen off it, filled up on Fairmount. Set off down the Deerfoot Trail, which turned into Highway 2, pointed the car north and drove. For a while I enjoyed the act of driving, clouds, darkening and lightening the earth, the fluid, nuanced shadows. CKUA at its best. So vast out here, every tiny object stands out in relief against the sweep of earth and sky. All light, colour and constant change. Stopped in Carstairs to look at the Alberta Wheat Pool elevator with the CPR cars cozied up to it. On the road again. After passing Red Deer the drive became incredibly tedious and I stopped several times just to move my body and keep awake.

Near Edmonton the temperature plummeted. Intermittent rain, sparse and dry. Patches of old snow. Although Edmonton was greening up it had a worn look. Even the prosperous areas I entered to get downtown seemed rough-hewn. Edmonton's downtown is a maze of one-way streets and I couldn't even get near the CN/VIA station. I eventually entered a parking lot with endless levels, becoming more and more internal and cavernous with each corner until I finally realized I was driving in circles. Tailed by some speeding psycho who kept blaring his horn at me. Finally met Fred in the station and I was almost right on time. He had a wonderful VIA trip and I was so happy to hear that.

**

Adjustment is hard. I know Fred is feeling strange, as if he doesn't belong. I feel invaded. He feels I'm not welcoming him, and I admit to feeling quite ambivalent about his arrival. The separation couldn't have gone on any longer for us. Each week added more distance, the voice on the phone becoming ever more disembodied. I am finding him pushy, aggressive and calculating at times, and I certainly don't trust him. I don't think I will ever be able to trust him again after the last year. I know I can't do anything right in his eyes but I really just don't care. I have learned I can get by as well as anyone else. I feel as if I'm on trial but he said he felt the same way with me. I missed him a lot more than he missed me. I still strongly suspect that the only reason he came is because he couldn't bear to be parted from his stuff. But I do understand him feeling like an unwelcome guest.

I can't sort out how I feel at all. I still love him but I don't know if I'm truly being unwelcoming or if he's truly trying to take over. There's such a lack of trust I can't relax with him. I can't really be myself without worrying over when the next outburst will be. Even when it seems we're getting along well and are close, there is always this niggling doubt now. Anything could cause a wave of resentment some time down the line.

June 7

Picked up a couple of tickets to the World Cup equestrian jumping competition at Spruce Meadows, courtesy of CPR. Very sunny, very dry. Windy too. CPR tent: beef on a bun, beans, line dancers and a barbershop quartet. This company is hilariously uncool. And every bit as secretive and siloed as it was in Montréal. I hope CPR can compete with a newly privatized, born-again and extremely aggressive CN. I also hope CPR can hold the line with a resurgent CP Limited who is closely watching the bottom line, and the huge Conrail carve-up in the US.

Met up with Peta and Doug, Rick, Christine, Cheryl and Dawn Robinson and spent a very pleasant afternoon watching the show with them. We ventured into the stables, into the world behind the stage: grooms, attendants, cleaners. The horses stand in their stalls like stars in dressing rooms. They are so huge and muscular, with beautiful, intelligent eyes. A warning on one of the stalls said, "Horse may bite." For some reason, the horses seemed to find me fascinating. Their huge heads would crane, swivel, extend to wherever I was standing as if they were magnetically attracted to me. A dozen giant totemic heads coming at me, wanting to nuzzle! It occurred to me I have never been anywhere near this close to a horse before and that's probably why they impressed me so much.

June 24

Saint-Jean-Baptiste/Fete nationale in Montréal. Just another workday here. Amazing weather. Rain, hail, sunlight – all at once. Perfect double rainbow lasting forever. Sky both full of cloud and dancing with sunlight. Fred and I went to Carseland Park for an evening picnic. It is about 60 kms from Calgary but as usual, felt like a long voyage away from the city. Incredible prairie view. Because it's been unusually rainy, the fields were vivid green and every type of cloud imaginable played across the bone china sky. Pumpjacks grazed in the fields. Perpetual up and down, like metronomes. A pumpjack is a hydraulic oil drill. I'm learning more every day about Alberta's famous Oil Patch. It is inescapable. Resistance is futile.

Carseland is literally a one-horse town. A lone horse looked at us as we passed. An Alberta Wheat Pool grain elevator, rail cars, the Blue Hotel and a tiny shopping plaza. A smattering of stucco bungalows with a new subdivision encroaching on them. Alberta is rural. There is nothing comparable to this in Ontario or Québec. We turned down a gravel road and suddenly the earth split open, revealing lakes, winding paths, hills, dales, all hidden, contained inside the flat prairie. Startling to find water, green trees and hills as if an egg had been cracked open revealing a tiny world inside.

Carseland Park is a fishing weir. We had our picnic and I revelled in the water and light. Pelicans! It was as if we had discovered a benign Jurassic Park. A lost in time, lost paradise feeling. Something wondrous like a road opening into the underworld. Incredible drive back. Land and sky so tender. Dark on my left side, a cloud avalanche. Fields saturated with green, ponds the colour of blueberries. On my right, rays fanned from a cloud. Seeing two worlds at once can make driving very difficult. Crack of thunder. Lightning bones dancing in the distance. Meanwhile, on my right, heavenly serenity.

**

Calgary is gearing up for the infamous Stampede. The lotto booth in the TD Centre is festooned with saddles, steer horns, chaps, wooden signs saying “Gold” or “Lodging.” Cowboys range across the Bank of Montreal’s windows, supplanting last year’s CP Rail trains. At lunch people actually go shopping for Stampede costumes.

**

Racist graffiti on the No 10 bus. “Toothpick Chinks, Yellow-skinned Packis, Thick Liped Niggers, Whites are the best.” I wonder if the guy who wears the leather jacket with a Militant Front decal was the auteur.

July 4

Stampede week in Calgary. Today is parade day. Set off for work at the usual time. Two women arrived at the bus stop in full western regalia. The usual driver wore a cowboy hat and shirt. Almost everyone was dressed in western or pseudo-western paraphernalia. Windows displayed bales of hay and giant saddles. You can't see in or out of any of the windows as they are all covered with some of the crudest sloppiest painting I have ever seen in my life. "Ya Hooo!" "Yeeehah!" "Howdy Pardner."

Had to disembark at 11th Ave and from there I took the C-train into downtown. People were already lining the streets, staking claim to prime views. Kids wrapped in blankets, drawing chalk pictures on the street. Lawn chairs invaded the downtown core. Outdoor stampede breakfasts on every corner. Coffee stands, Jaywalkers! In Calgary! Pulse of country music. I could feel the bass flexing the GCS building.

The parade itself is a long, cheesy, over-grown small-town parade full of ratty mascots and way too many grimly inept marching bands. Ceaseless catwalk of covered wagons, horses, square dancers, barbershop quartetters. But there were some interesting things. The legion is strong here. A couple of 100 year-old WWI veterans floated past. There were co-op and farmers' groups as well as wagons containing people dressed in pioneer outfits bearing signs saying "Descendents of P. Irving." There were several of these pioneer settler groups. I found this fascinating.

Being Calgary, which is actually a strong law and order town, the parade was well controlled. Traffic control, parking control, street control, crowd control. Police out in full force but they were friendly and helpful. Here they seem to have a concept of a policeman as doing a civic duty as well as law enforcement; the friendly policeman on TV shows. A lot more accessible than the racist brutes in the SQ. Parade marshals planted along the streets held up giant cue cards to the "studio audience," prompting us to shout "Ya-Hoo" and applaud. I think they permanently posted one woman in front of the CPR bleachers on 9th Ave in an attempt to whip us into some kind of Stampede spirit. We were a tough room. At one point Preston Manning passed and only received some tepid clapping from our whole large section of transferees. The enthusiasm increased after he went on by.

Some of the parade officials were aware of who we were. Someone asked how many of us were from Calgary. Only a few hands went up. Another guy, trying to cajole a “yahoo” out of us said, “Wait til next year.” Others seemed to expect a lukewarm response from our section of 9th Ave and smiled knowingly. We were the Bloc CPR!

Although most of us hung back, some CPR transferees went out of their way to join in, out-westerning the westerners. A French woman in front of me was getting into the spirit, applauding and calling out “Bravo.” The marshal came by with her “Yahoo” sign and the French woman then called out “Yahoo” and taught her small children to say it too. Then the Québec City Carnaval float passed. We all shouted “Bonjour” at the Bonhomme and applauded with so much enthusiasm it stunned the people on the float!

July 7

Scott Adams has made a fortune lampooning corporate life with his comic strip, *Dilbert*, which really isn’t all that good (Dogbert? Really?) but is very popular because everyone can relate to it, including me. I write a personal memoir about relocation, a story I have the right to tell, coming out in a literary journal that maybe four people might see and pandemonium breaks out, involving a cast of hundreds.

Act I

I write a memoir about the CPR relocation. It is accepted by Terry Byrnes for *Matrix*, a literary journal based in Montréal. I wrote it because it is the kind of upheaval people have to face these days for careers. I also feel I have earned the right to tell this story. This is my personal story not an official corporate narrative.

Act II

I receive an email on my home account from Terry Byrnes, who said he was at Windsor Station to take photographs for the article. He is a very fine, professional photographer and again, this had nothing to do with the company. This was to illustrate a personal narrative published in a literary journal. He was nabbed by security guards.

They made him write a Merlin message, formally asking permission to take photos in the station. Never mind that the building is a heritage site and tourists take photos there every day. Terry emailed me because he was concerned he might have inadvertently got me into trouble. I appreciated the call and the warning but shrugged it off. Why would the CPR care about this?

Act III

I go into work and Steve Morris (aka the Manatee) is on the phone talking about damage control and people trespassing on CP property to take pictures! I glance over at Dave's Merlin screen and see Terry's request for permission followed by at least a dozen appended messages.

Act IV

Ralph gets involved and sends me the entire email circus. Terry's request for permission went to MS, PR mandarin for Windsor Station, who emailed Ralph and a dozen people saying, "What's going on? Do you know about this? I don't want Windsor Station to be shown as a waste land." Dennis Apedaile emails Ralph saying, "Don't you have any control over your department?" Ralph fires back a reply-all saying, "I know all about the project and approved it." All lies. Way to go, Ralph!

Act V

Just when it seems the stewpot has simmered down, Cement Head summons me into his office, demands to know what "the plan" is, what the angle of the article is and if it will embarrass the company. I explain as patiently as I can to CH that I wrote a memoir about my relocation experience and I don't have any angle at all, except maybe self-development. As for my "accomplice" (Cement Head's word) all he was doing was taking a picture to illustrate the article. We did not have any arrangement. We were not in cahoots. Cement Head couldn't grasp the concept of a literary journal, of independent writing, or any kind of writing that's not legal or corporate. He made me write a disclaimer, that I didn't write the *Matrix* piece as a CPR employee. I felt just like Bart Simpson at the chalkboard. Hopefully this will end the brouhaha.

Terry Byrnes called me this evening to find out what happened. I told him I was glad he had emailed me or I would have walked straight into a landmine. I've been stepping on mines ever since I started but this was absurd. We laughed over a phrase I had used in the article, "salary-sucking pinheads," and wondered how these VPs etc can justify making huge salaries when they seem to have enough time to harass little people over nothing. He said a bunch of top level people at Concordia recently retired with packages bigger than any salary he could ever hope to make and this makes him angry. We agreed that today's ridiculous little drama was an eye-opener into being inside a corporate system.

Being Terry Byrnes he had to bring up the subject of writing somewhere in the conversation. "If nothing else," he said, "you're 'out' as an independent writer." The article should be coming out in August. He wished me all the best; at this point it looks as if I'll need all the best wishes I can get!

July 10

The Calgary Stampede is a week-long party. (Actually ten days!) Everyone dressed in denim., plaid shirts, vests, bandanas, bolo ties, Stetsons, both real and fake. The streets are crowded. Stephen Ave is hopping! People are even jaywalking. Outside the 20th floor window, the mountains are blue waves. Cowboys has rented the parking lot beside us and is thundering "new country/pop" music. A sea of white hats, people like tiny wind-up toys, twirling and two-stepping to Shania. "My Maria" plays again, a song I have already heard three times this morning. There is a seismic thud throughout the entire city and I can imagine every office tower in town shattering from the vibrations, crashing into the streets.

Bivouacs of stampede breakfasts scattered all over the city. GCS had its big pancake and sausage breakfast yesterday. Hay bales, bulls, lamas, covered wagons, Dan-the-One-Man-Band. Most of us were not sartorially prepared and we are making do with pulling something casual out of our closets and topping it off with CPR bolo ties or bandanas. We're starting to look like a cult.

**

Another in the series of Calgary Nights. This time a special Stampede edition. Left the office around two with Peta, Rick and Larry to do research on the customs and sociology of Calgary Stampede week. We tried the Silver Slipper Saloon but it was closed. Walked down to Dusty's but it was jam-packed and Larry refused to pay the 8\$ cover charge. We ended up at Buzzards Cowboy Cuisine with its always dependable Testicle Festival. We were joined there by Colin Cook, a photo service supplier and pal of the Graphics gang. Had an interesting conversation with him. He's moved around so much in his life he can't say where he's from. He has lived in Calgary for three years and before that, Amsterdam. He's Dutch and his last name is actually "Kok." The name was changed upon arrival to Canada for obvious schoolyard reasons. While on my way to the bathroom I ran into Ralph and Dave Jones, looking sinister in a dark corner in the bar side of Buzzards. It felt like running into footpads in a dark alley. Ralph ordered me to bring Peta, Rick and Larry back to join him but none of them budged. Finally Ralph and his sidekick came out and joined us.

Mary Helen and Jennifer joined us later in the afternoon. Ralph told them that he's taking over BIS in September. He thumped his chest and postured over how he had hand-picked his department and hired only the best. They are contract employees and he played mind games by telling them how he had gone down to BIS to hire me. Now J and MH want him to take over BIS because they think they'll have a better chance getting on permanent with him.

I left Buzzards to meet Carol, Todd Hirsch and Annie at the Paralyzer (in the Palliser). Ralph and Mary Helen joined us. Carol and I pounded out the two-step on the table while Jennifer watched, as if we were part of an experiment. Because Ralph was there, alcohol kept appearing. I was surprised by how close Carol and Ralph were. Carol detests Ralph but at the table they were the only two who belonged together, two old veterans, carnival performers playing their old shell games, telling their old lies, manipulating the people around them mostly because they can't help themselves. All of the rest of us are new.

Todd suggested we end the night at a trendy bistro called the Vicious Circle. We were all up for the suggestion except for Ralph who continued sitting at the Paralyzer, sulking. It was Mary Helen who talked him into coming along. Like Calgary weather, Ralph's mood turned nasty. He asked MH who this Todd was that people got up and followed him. By the time we got to the Vicious Circle Ralph was really putting down Todd. At one point he waved at Todd and said, "Get the door, Grainboy." (Todd is a financial analyst who was recently hired in Calgary and he parses grain prices, futures, all things grain). He was also far more gracious than I would have been. I would have left but he acted as if Ralph didn't even exist. So many kudos to Todd, a class act. Most of us left soon after that except for Mary Helen who lingered at the VC with Ralph.

**

Stampede over. Everyone reverted back to the workaday world. No more cowboys, chuck wagons, six-shooters. Back to suits and casual Friday attire as if Stampede had never occurred. The people on the bus looked as if they were on their way to a funeral.

**

Went to Escoba for food and wine with the Social Club, made up of Carol, Todd, Mary Helen, Jennifer and Annie Digeonanni who works with Todd in Finance. Todd Hirsch is from small-town Alberta but is urbane, quite a bit like Greg Gunhold. He seems to be on a mission to show us a more sophisticated view of Calgary. This is exactly what I need! It's a nice group, free of the excessive alcohol and weirdness of my own department. After dinner we went to see *Men in Black*. It was a mainstream American action movie and if I hadn't had coffee I would have fallen asleep during the first twenty minutes. I did end up liking it though. Interesting concept of an extraterrestrial Ellis Island, a centre for interplanetary refugees, immigrants. Most intrigued by the idea of completely changing your identity and having all memory of yourself erased. Would I do it?

July 26

Day trip to Drumheller to see the badlands. Drove forever along Highway 9, prairies vivid, fluid, emerald green, deep gold. Then it started becoming hilly and the car moved up and down as if riding waves. We descended into Drumheller, a town literally built into the badlands. It has such a dramatic, mythical setting it was hard to forget it's a rural Alberta town rapidly overtaken by fast food chains. Still has a mom-and-pop post office/family restaurant/ice cream/tourist bureau. Tiny houses beaten into the ground. We crossed the wire suspension bridge at Rosedale. The other side of the river was like Death Valley, an alien topography of buttes, coal slag. Grey sage, petrified roots, rock that breaks off and crumbles in your hands – texture of dried clay. The plants look dry, skeletal yet surprisingly soft and pliant to touch.

Took the hoodoo trail at Rosedale. The earth cuts away and you descend into this cave-like world. Ancient and unearthly world existing below and paralleling the upper world you're used to. Bone-white, bleached on the verge of becoming fine sand. Hoodoos look like old columns from an ancient temple. Some look like mushrooms. We clambered among the hoodoos and found a cave. Tried to imagine the first explorers finding this area. These are the bones, stripped, naked, flayed by hot winds, stripped of vegetation, stripped of luxury, stark, a creation of the element, shaped by drastic forces.

Bus tour at Horseshoe Park. Tiny tourist building in the middle of nowhere with a huge bus beside it, the kind used in Antarctica, the only clue the land wasn't what it appeared to be. The bus moved slowly around the field then slowly spiralled down into the underworld. Horse Park consists of parts of three farmers' fields. What must it have been life for these farmers (or their ancestors) buying a field and finding this, of having to tell your children not to go out back and fall off the edge into Hades. In 1743 François and Louis Joseph de Verendrye encountered this eerie landscape of mesas, buttes and coulees and called it "mauvaise terre." Badlands indeed.

Rain, melting snow, wind, winter freeze and thaw have deepened the coulees, dug sinkholes, carved a random pattern of channels called rills, and formed the hoodoos. Huge forces shaped this land. Bentonite clay: volcanic ash mixed with silt and sand, weathered to form creamy grey clay. The clay shrinks, cracks and when wet, becomes soapy.

Layered like the rings on a tree. The white band near the top of a butte or mesa is whitemud. They also contain coal seams. Layers of dead plants buried then pressure-cooked into coal. Some of these coal seams still smoulder and will do so forever. More Hades imagery! Dark shales, grey mudstone, volcanic ash, petrified wood, oyster shells, clay ironstone nodules. Purplish rocks rich in manganese. Red rocks with high concentrations of iron. All of this could be mixed with teeth from small meat-eating dinosaurs (therapods)! Compressed fossil whorls like ancient fingerprints.

Time to return to the world of agriculture and crops. The bus climbed up the slopes, out of the underworld and we stood along in the field, exactly the way we left it to begin our descent. No one around, fields as calm as they had been when we arrived, wind playing in my hair. It was gone, the earth sealed back up as if our memories had been erased of this ancient wild deep world we had only been permitted to glimpse.

Aug. 2

Marsha, John and Martin arrived! At first I thought it would be strange to meet them at the airport, rather than see them drive up to the house, their car full of clothes, bags of food and cheapie mystery series. But they looked so familiar, as if no time had passed since our last visit. Marsha and John both looked exactly the same, reminding me that in terms of time, it really hasn't been that long. Martin is two years old now, a lively boy who seems to resemble Marsha's side of the family, at least going by old pictures I've seen of her brothers.

Marsha as two-sided as ever. Rational, logical, fair, just, contradictory, arguing the other side of whatever has been posited. A solar/lunar, day/night revolution to Marsha. Her emotions wax and wane like the moon. The two sides seem to be in sharper discord and being a mother is rougher on her than the daytime/chaplain persona can accept. She says She and John are in a kind of holding position, that they're stagnating in Kingston. The prison for women is closing and John has already turned down a transfer to Kitchener. Their house is still for sale and has been on the market since before I moved. More stasis/uncertainty.

John said he will never leave Kingston while she sees everyone moving on, “finding new jobs, new pastures.” She thinks John is burying his head in the sand, not even accepting change. Marsha quit her job at the Learning Centre at Queen’s. Finally unshacked from her awful incompetent boss. Like Fred, she is currently unemployed.

**

We waited for for ages at the baggage pick-up. Their flight had locked the door to the baggage compartment and no luggage was coming down the chute. We waited and watched three unclaimed suitcases endlessly circle on the carousel. People milled around, moods shifting from anticipation to irritation to worry. Very Godot-like.

**

Set up camp at the house. Followed Martin around on his whirlwind tour, picking up objects and whisking them behind closed doors. Set up tables, found some old toys for Martin to play with. It was fun. The house had never looked so lived in, or animated. First visitors and they’re Marsha and John. I’m so happy to see them. Best of all is the feeling of continuity, that life goes on and there hasn’t been an irreparable tear between my life here and my life there.

**

BBQ at Marsha’s friend Lorna Kaufman’s duplex in Bowness. They’ve known each other since Marsha worked in the Industrial Relations library at Queen’s. Lorna is teaching at Mount Royal College and is getting her PhD in industrial relations. Her fiance, Bob, is also getting his PhD, in Management Information Systems. They’re getting married on Sunday, one of the reasons Marsha and John came out west this summer. They’re also spending a week in Edmonton with old friends of John, part of his old high school group that has remained together through the years. Marsha has been fixating on this wedding since they arrived. The litany is familiar: she doesn’t believe in weddings, doesn’t want to go, it’s not well-planned, etc. But we all know she will go and she will find it meaningful, a milestone and she will toast her friends. And what’s wrong with that? Why does she struggle so much with herself?

She is conventional in a lot of ways yet rebels against her own wishes. She married John, bought a lovely house, gave birth to Martin. As a chaplain her sermons are affirmations of the conventional things she finds meaningful in life: family, friends, spiritual connection. These things all bring her joy. But there's always a struggle, rebellion, verbal pyrotechnics, emotional upheaval. She can't do anything without an inner battle. Currently she is upset with John. She feels he is passive and pathologically resistant to change. Some of her comments to John are nasty with a real edge to them, "truthful" remarks coming out of her repressed anger. I know what I'm talking about, I can hear myself doing it with Fred. John often doesn't respond. But today he said, "You're always right Marsha."

John is wonderful with Martin; calm, patient, playful. I love the look of delighted surprise on John's face when Martin does something for the first time. I love seeing him play with Martin in the backyard. Marsha loves Martin. She is nurturing and has a lot of common sense about parenthood. However, there are times when that same brittle anger comes out. A near rage crackles up to the sky when Martin is being especially demanding about something. One moment on the stairs she came close to throwing a tantrum. "What do you want, Martin? I'm to stand here all day and pay court to a twit?" Not even five minutes later she was cheerful again. These breaks are getting deeper and more abrupt. Too much switching back to "good behaviour" with no acknowledgement of it happening in the first place. Unexpected power surges instantly dissipating.

Aug. 7

Lovely day at Lake Louise and Moraine Lake. Finally got to see Lake Louise in vivid summer colours, contrast of the deep orange poppies against the turquoise lake. It's still incredible to think that I can return here any time I want. Marsha and I both prefer Moraine Lake, wilder and less populated. Shared some lovely moments caught in a flash rainstorm, glimpsing the purest blue water through dark evergreens. Traffic jam on the return trip. Magnificent herd of elk crossing the highway.

Aug 8

Spent the morning at the zoo with Marsha and Martin. Later, Marsha and I went to see *Contact*. This movie has received a lot of attention because it supposedly takes on the big questions of science and religious faith. A lot of people, including Lorna Kaufman and Jennifer at BIS, have found it profound. Neither Marsha nor I found it profound. The questions are only ones that anyone with any kind of spiritual desire has asked for generations, the neoPlatonists, the scientists who ushered in the Age of Enlightenment. The science and religion duality has been a theme throughout human history. *Contact* throws in communication with extraterrestrial life but the questions remain the same.

I also found the movie only skirted around the questions anyway. It was actually a collage. There were all the beautiful silent free-fall images of space like *2001*. There was the psychodrama of the Jodie Foster character and her “daddy.” Throw in a whiff of romance, a few terrorists skulking around, the old boys’ scientific bureaucracy and a few metaphysical scraps and you have *Contact*. The sequence where the Foster character is actually travelling through time and space during the missing eighteen hours was convincing and breath-taking. I could also accept that the character would, on a psychological level, see her father in the unearthly world she entered.

As usual I was fascinated more by Foster and the character she portrayed than anything else. Like *Silence of the Lambs* she plays a woman who is alone in the world, haunted by a father figure yet also trying to make her way within a male establishment – the police force in *Lambs* and science in *Contact*. She proves herself but only after being tested in the most drastic, transformative ways imaginable. Her woman-alone characters speak to me, the almost mythological quests she must undertake, alone.

Aug. 9

To Drumheller. Hot scouring wind at the Hoodoos. The seemingly open fields at Horseshoe Valley until the earth splits open to the land of the dead. Our voices drowned in the wind strumming the telephone wires stretching to nowhere, stray trucks vanishing on the highway. Eurydice gone, the riverbeds dry.

Crossed the suspension bridge at Rosedale to Death Valley. Slag and sage. A land made for buzzards. Grasses rolling on forever, a sky that never stops changing. Every now and then a bird flares up then drops back down into the grasses. The distances between one horizon and another, the past and present. That was then. This is now.

Aug. 11

Took the day off to say goodbye to Marsha., John and Martin. Their friends from Edmonton came in a van to pick them up. We all had lunch at the Metro Café, one of Calgary's little surprises. Nondescript on the outside, wedged in the Macleod Trail strip. Inside painted to evoke a street scene in Montréal. Bright, creative and full of joie de vivre. Posts look like streetlights. All the details are there, a cat on a rooftop, a snoopy neighbour at the window, laundry strung across the ceiling, a café terrasse, a boulangerie. Time for the visit to end. I have a feeling of regeneration, a sense that the past hasn't all disappeared. Marsha and I embraced. And, for the first time in all the years I've known him, John and I embraced.

Aug. 12

At around two in the afternoon Ralph whisked Dave and me to the Palliser. Seemed like a very exciting opportunity for me. A CPR display train is heading across the country as part of CP's new logo launch and it needs a couple of people to staff it. Jonathan Hanna will likely be one of them and Ralph indicated that I may get the second berth!

While at the Palliser I found out that tonight is Dave and Erika's anniversary. They have only been married for two years. His first marriage last fifteen years or so and his ex's name is Cat. Dave is the kind of guy who would be married to someone named Cat. He left early and I ended up spending the evening at the Palliser bar with Ralph Wilson. The Asian bartenders know him well, flirt with him, call him "Mr Weelson." At first I actually enjoyed Ralph's company and I admit to being a little starry-eyed, thinking he might be serious about the display train opportunity.

He painted an exciting picture. Five weeks across the country, asking questions, filing stories. All the things I could learn from the railroaders, breakfasts in greasy spoons across the country, prairie sunsets. He even described how I “as an officer of the company” would have to dress in fell safety regalia. Ralph is extremely good at conjuring pictures and making you believe in them. I ended up wanting to so this so badly I could taste it. He is one of these people who blur the boundaries between real emotion and acting. It didn’t take too long before I realized he had conned me.

Ralph struck up a conversation with some guy at the bar who works for Bell. He bought the guy drinks and made me pay. His excuse was that he was teaching me how to file expense accounts. Then the evening fell completely apart. He proceeded to blame me for everything wrong with the *News* and listed all these anal thing that would affect my PMP. The evening ended when he walked me to the nearest bank machine and said, “As your boss I’m asking you to lend me \$100.”

Aug. 17

Saw *the Quiet Room*, an Australian film directed by Rolf de Heer. The film is centered around an unnamed seven year-old girl who stops talking to her parents when she sees their marriage collapsing. She tries to communicate with them through her silence, often seeming to forget she hasn’t actually said anything. She tries to influence her parents’ behaviour, force them to stay together. Except for a few critical moments she is mute throughout the film, her thoughts and feelings expressed in a voice-over only the audience can hear. The camera is confined to the girl’s bedroom and her parents’ room, at first giving the film a claustrophobic feeling. After a while I adjusted and the surroundings became cozy and familiar and I started empathizing with what the girl will lose because of her parents’ break-up.

For most of the film the girl’s voice-over isn’t too precocious. There are details that are precise and just-right about her world. The audience can also see where she’s not right about her parents, places where she can’t possibly know what they’re thinking or feeling. The movie deserves a lot of credit for not trying to fill that in, fake it or place too much omnipotence in the point-of-view of a young girl.

**

Video: *Sub Urbia* by Eric Bogosian who directed *Talk Radio* in 1989(?). Chilling, more like a play than a movie in the way it seemed so staged. The dépanneurs, strip clubs and subdivisions appeared like a stage background, there, somehow implicitly fuelling the action. If you can call it that. There was little movement among the characters. They were precisely grouped. When drama did unfold between two characters the rest of the cast silently faded into the background, collapsing like lawn chairs, while the main action went on. A very effective exploration of isolation and anomie, the lack of real relationship between people and the implicit connection between people and their joyless backgrounds.

Aug. 31

Saturday night news. Princess Diana killed in a violent car crash in a tunnel in Paris. Hunted down by tabloid paparazzi. So sudden. So violent. She had turned thirty-six on July 1. I can't believe it, really cannot believe this. It seems like a hoax. I truly loved the "People's Princess" and was so happy to see her prevail over those old ghouls in the palace.

Sept. 5

Social club evening. Todd, Mary Helen, Annie and a couple of friends of Annie's. We started the evening at the Embassy, a retro lounge full of 1950s style chrome, heavy chairs and booths. The downstairs was very strange, divided into tiny dim rooms, light reflecting off the chrome, a huge array of bottles, could have been in a David Lynch movie.

This is a diverse group. Annie is in Finance. Everything about her is big. She suffuses the air with a musky perfume. She has presence and has lived in a lot of places, including Brazil. Yet she seems so corporate. She's a nice person, generous, eager to please but has such a literal way of looking at the world. Her friend Christine looked like a head stenographer from the 1940s, very tidy in a grey linen suit. She was working at CPR on contract and was recently hired on as permanent employee. This upset Mary Helen.

Normally Mary Helen is much more easy-going than Jennifer about working as a contractor. But this was hard to take. MH has a house, a mortgage, taxes etc to pay. She lives alone. Her salary at BIS leaves her with nothing to spare. She accepts this with far more grace and humour than I did those last couple of years at McGill. But hearing about Christine was the last straw. She asked Christine how it was that she was hired on when MH and Jennifer couldn't be.

Annie displayed a real lack of knowledge about life and it was obvious to me this woman has never had to struggle. She passionately toed the corporate line and said, "It's all up to you. You have to work hard and show you have value to the company." Well that made me mad. Anyone who has ever done contract work, had to scuffle around for any length of time know this is only so much heartless bullshit, and yet another way of blaming an individual for systemic failures. So much depends on the workplace, the department, the manager and who may or may not be willing to support you. Nothing at CPR is done from the bottom up. Nothing. And that is only considering the company. Just try adding in the economy and the devaluation of certain kinds of jobs as compared to others. Mary Helen, Todd and I all disagreed with Annie's viewpoint.

Mary Helen and I decided to leave and we went on to the Pied Pickle where we could talk. She was upset about Christine and Anne's obtuseness (quite rightly I think). In turn I let off some steam about Ralph and that night at the Palliser. Just who am I working for anyway? Some drunken barfly spinning lines to a person of no importance. Too weird. MH has a gift for people. She's down-to-earth and humorous. Animated but in a low-key way. Her personality shines without dominating. She can get along with anyone and her ease with others is genuine. She says she just likes "being chatty with people." I do feel lucky I can talk to her about CP life.

MH met up with some Maritimes friends at the Pied Pickle and we all ended up in taxis, in a sudden downpour, heading to Primo's on 15th Ave. This turned out to be a sleazy cave filled with businessmen, Ralph Steadman caricatures leering at us over cocktails. MH and I both hated it and we left. Tonight in the back seat of another taxi, looking out at the blurred lights of Macleod Trail I couldn't stop thinking of that last ride of Princess Diana through the tunnel.

**

Spellbound by Princess Diana's funeral. This has gone so far beyond any personal grief for a public figure. This is myth; the grief collective. No palace could control it. Apparently, at the urging of Prince Charles who understands something of archetypes and the collective through Carl Jung's works, Queen Elizabeth made a public personal statement.

The casket made its way through the streets on its gun carriage. Crowds surged around it, tossed flowers on the limousine. It was like a scene from *the Canterbury Tales*! But what made the procession so stately and mythical was the silence. All those people and it was silent except for a bell tolling once a minute. The service was also unique. Again, the people had their say and the palace had no choice. The music consisted of Diana's favourite songs. Her brother gave a personal, passionate eulogy in which he spoke out against both the paparazzi and the palace. The palace couldn't control Diana or her image in life and now they will be haunted by the young, tragic "people's princess." Now I know how epic poetry is written; the beautiful, mythical princess buried on an island covered in flowers.

Sept. 14

Went with Fred to the CPR logo launch at Ogden Shops. We spent a long time exploring the shops. It must have taken a lot of work for the guys to clean everything, make sure things were shut down and safe, settings cleared, etc. Saw locomotives, locomotive cladding, bogies, all as they are worked on. Got an idea of how much labour goes into maintaining a railway. Mechanics, electricians, brakemen, blacksmiths, cleaners, repairmen – the list is almost endless. Saw how the engines work. I found the blacksmith's area particularly fascinating, a scene out of Dickens, unchanged from the Industrial Revolution. All of those "dark and satanic mills." Safety posters everywhere, EFAP brochures, bulletin boards covered with union notices. An upcoming legion event. A yellowed newspaper clipping with a racist comment written on it was apparently overlooked in the clean-up.

Nasty day, everyone bundled up. No suits and no obvious division between head office and union workers. Weather levelling the playing field. They made me feel excited and proud to work for the railway again now that I was close to its real operations. Families were touring the shops and it was nice hearing the workers' pride and passion as they showed off what they did at work, their intimacy with the machines they tend every day. At a coffee booth I saw two CPR pensioners, who hadn't seen each other in twenty years, embrace. Neither knew until today the other was living in Calgary!

The launch itself was actually pretty good. Someone presented a George Stephen/Van Horne skit that was actually entertaining, making it a little risqué for CPR head office. Corporate propaganda leavened with a little humour. The two actors made a lot of jokes about the old multi-mark and American flag logos. Fred and I figured it had to be a union production and I did think Hugh McDiarmid seemed uncomfortable while it was going on. The locomotive came out, resplendent in its new "Action Red" livery and the new logo (beaver, shield, maple leaf) on its side. Some fireworks, a mercifully short speech by Rob Ritchie. All quite well done, fun and poignant at times.

Sept. 22

Meeting with Sheila Carruthers at CP Limited. CP Ltd is hidden in Banker's Hall and is posh. The carpets are so plush they completely muffled the sound of my footsteps. No fingerprints on the polished mahogany. The receptionist sat in her mahogany watch-tower. All requests stop at this corporate customs booth. Doors are closed. The furniture in the reception area looks like the type you see in the Palliser Hotel. It conveys a hidden, cloaked, greased-wheel power. Machinations of business whirring under the polish and trappings of tradition. This is truly old-boy power, the iron fist in the velvet glove. Makes CPR, its railway subsidiary, look cheap.

Sheila Carruthers is Donations Officer for the CPL Charitable Foundation and I was interviewing her to promote the foundation. She loves her job, loves working with the foundation, loves the projects they are involved with. Strongly believes in the credo of helping people help themselves.

When Ralph gave me the assignment I didn't want to do it. I read the folder and got the impression the foundation was really only interested in sponsoring business schools and colleges to line their own pockets with news executives. But Sheila's enthusiasm, won me over. I do love meeting people through this job, especially those who love their work. I may begin the piece by saying "Sheila Carruthers loves her job ..."

**

Meeting with Carol Lacourte and Larry regarding a bulletin Carol agreed to do for the higher-ups who are too busy to scan "Inside Track." I think Isabel may be right and Carol's losing it. She seems desperately afraid of losing her job and it does seem as if that is colouring her judgment. It is also making her appear very callous to her staff.

Sept. 23

Ralph showed up at my cubicle and told me to arrange for a plane ticket to Ottawa, and a rental car. I'm going to Smiths Falls to do a story on the CPR logo launch display train, which will be in Smith's Falls on Oct. 1. He also mentioned that Smiths Falls is a railway town, which sounds like a better story than a logo launch. My first business trip! Spent most of the afternoon negotiating travel details with Rider then called Marsha to see about staying with her and John in Kingston for a few days.

**

Wonderful email from a Mike Scott in Schreiber, Ontario about my driving school filler for the September CPR News. The subject line said, "Excellent article!"— and it went uphill from there:

"Lesley – Just wanted to send on a comment about your article 'The Rockies Made Me Do It' in the latest CPR News. I found it not only witty and amusing, but well written to boot! The imagery and metaphor is perfect and conveys exactly what you feel. I thought the entire piece was a bright shiny spot in an otherwise gray and drab paper (a paper that usually ends up in file thirteen largely unread!)"

“What I really liked about it is that I could really relate to what you were saying; I, too, sometimes feel like one of Kerouac’s Dharma Bums while driving (especially here, in the middle of nowhere); I learned to drive in Montreal (in an automatic, then five years later bought a standard shift Renault in St. Henri and hopped and bounced and stalled it all the way home to NDG at rush hour); and the comment about ‘alpha baboons’ made me smile, especially when I think of driving in Montreal, where everyone wants to be the alpha baboon! Anyway, just wanted to say thanks! for a great article!

Mike Scott

Schrieber”

I am going to print this message and add it to my chest of keepers. This is the best response ever for something I’ve written.

Sept. 24

Fred’s mother arrived today. I guess I hoped the visit would be more meaningful after some good phone conversations we have had since the move. But no. She was the same old Valkyrie, loud, opinionated on the most trivial matters imaginable. Still banging on about Québec politics and claiming the only reason she is staying in the province is because of April. She is a high maintenance guest in that she needs a lot of attention. It’s a lot like having a young child around. I spent most of the weekend preparing for my trip to Smiths Falls, packing, collecting maps, learning how to rewind film and load the cameras. It’s the rental car and all the driving that worries me most. We took Marria out to Horseshoe Valley, Drumheller and the hoodoos. I am proud to report I didn’t murder her there.

Sept. 29

Boarded a Canadian plane to Ottawa. Usual sense of being bound in a straitjacket. I actually look forward to the ginger ale, the flight dinner and even the movie the way a hospital patient would. The tiny bag of roasted peanuts is the highlight of the flight.

The movie was *Liar, Liar*, a Jim Carrey movie that I found unexpectedly funny. Carrey does a little too much mugging for me, but he does have an intensity bordering on the dark and strange, which I do like. Out the window I saw prairies spread out like a quilt; brown, yellow, green squares, an occasional ranch tucked in the back corner of one of those squares. Glint of a pond, scribble of a narrow river. Brown puckered earth shrivelling down into coulees. Completely different world when we reached Ottawa. Red leaves, squares ruffed in foliage. Reds, oranges, golds. Clouds, soft air, wooded areas and so many swimming pools. Home, my climate, my temperature, my geography. Amazing though the Alberta landscape is it is still alien to me.

Scared to death when I picked up the rental car at Budget. Looked at maps of Ottawa and eastern Ontario. Wrote out crib sheets of directions. At the booth I filled in forms and they wrote “Canadian Pacific Railway” on the entire record. Here I was, showing my Alberta driver’s license without a clue what I was doing. None of this mattered because I am a CPR employee and as long as they had a company name I could be a serial killer. The car turned out to be a beige Nissen Sentra and I sat in the parking lot for ages, figuring out the controls, how things worked and where everything was. I sat back and breathed, then eventually put it into gear and lunged out of the airport. Driving through Ottawa I joined a cast of thousands trying to get onto the Queensway, but it wasn’t all that nerve-wracking after all and my familiarity with the car increased the farther I drove from the city.

Down Highway 7, road bordered by leaves of Tuscan red, scarlets, vermillions, crimsons. The colours stood out against the darkening sky like low-banked fires. Hard to keep my eyes on the road. Sumacs so deep and red you could practically warm your hands over them. Soft sultry clouds and flaming leaves. Yes, I’m home. Made it into Smiths Falls but realized on the corner of Main St and Beckwith that I didn’t know how to get to the Best Western. Unlike Calgary, there is no grid lay-out to Smiths Falls and just follows the contours of the Rideau. Streets shapeshift and their names change on a whim. Lombard St curves and becomes Beckwith St South. Barrie is just like this.

Dinner in the Best Western restaurant. I was the only person there. Trying to keep myself from panicking because of how much the trip has cost. What story could I possibly bring back that would be worth the cost of this airline ticket? I also had no idea what to write about. It's not that I was given any guidelines by either Ralph or Dave. This Best Western was bare bones. No hot water! And I really had to slow my pace. In the morning I was once again the only person in the restaurant. All I wanted was coffee and the pot was within reach but I wasn't allowed to serve myself. The server insisted on ceremoniously bringing out cutlery, a place setting and a mug of coffee.

Smiths Falls is a CPR town. I decided to get myself in the mood and explored the railway museum. It was closed but the locomotives and cars were wide open so I could wander around and climb inside. Railway ties stacked like pyres, bogies choked in weeds, a peeling multi-mark. Derelict equipment camouflaged in burnished grasses. So far nothing I add to a story around. I had no idea how long a story they wanted, or anything, and I could feel panic starting to set in again.

Smiths Falls has its eastern Ontario features: limestone churches, old mill, an especially imposing Carnegie library and old-time hotels, surrounded by flaming leaves. Fantasized about changing my identity, staying here and not returning to Calgary. I passed the library several times wondering what would happen if I went in and inquired about getting a job there. How one thing would lead to the next. I'd get a job in the library then find a room in the house of a friend or neighbour of one of the library ladies. No one would ever guess I would end up here. It all started seeming so possible.

SF is full of mementos of its time as a railway boomtown. The railyards extend forever, a tundra on the east side of town. Containers juxtaposed with the dark red brick of the old station. Graffiti-steeped hopper cars, more peeling multi-marks. Pigeons massing in the windows of the old station. This is now the town's Via station, where people still sit attentively on wooden benches as if on church pews. Beside it is the weathered St Lawrence & Hudson CPR yard office. The "railway district" looks like a town within a town with its multi-family dwellings. East End Billiards featured "Rack & Roll" and the Canal Dining Room.

A car with a “Railfan” license plate cruised by. My first clue that there might be an event here. I crossed paths several time with a man aiming at a Soo Line locomotive with the biggest lens I’ve ever seen. There are people out there who literally stalk trains. King Cole Cleaners on Ogden St is painted with a CPR mural. A steam locomotive – 1201 to be exact – is rendered in loving detail, along with people waiting at the station and a smiling signal man. It’s called “Waiting for the Train to Come in” and was painted by Pierre Hardy in 1989.

**

Returned to the yards this evening. This time I skulked around the back. A pink light stained the sky and the tracks seemed to lead into infinity. I thought I saw the logo-train in the very back corner of the yards. There was a rail car parked on a siding with a light on and a set of steps leading up to it. Not a living soul around, though. Since I am a CPR employee and had my ID ready to brandish, I started walking toward the train. The I heard gunshots. When I looked behind me I saw gravel spraying up. I had no idea if railroads carry guns out in the yards at twilight. There’s a woods at the edge of the yards and I had been warned about hunters. It didn’t matter any more that I would be the laughing-stock of Gulf Canada Square if I couldn’t get to this logo-train in the metropolis of Smiths Falls. I turned and ran.

Oct. 2

There’s something about not having a story that brings on a horrible sense of panic. I did not know what to do. I sat on a bench by the Rideau for a while, trying to think my way out of this predicament. I tried calling Dave in Calgary but of course there was no answer. I wandered through a dingy shopping centre for a while. Then I noticed a retirement home nearby. I walked into the visitors’ area of the retirement home and asked everyone I saw if they were railroaders or if they knew people who worked for the CPR. Well, this is Smiths Falls so the place was full of former CPR employees. One man referred to to a Mr McKinney who lived on Montague St, in the heart of the railway district.

I called Mr McKinney and he sounded really pleased about talking to me. I drove over to his house and he told me all about his childhood as a “railway brat.” All of a sudden I had my story, and was as excited as I had been down-and-out earlier. This was the heart and spirit of the logo-train story; the people who work and worked for the CPR, the generations, the history of the railway in these towns. Mr McKinney told me so many personal things about railway life and showed me letters his father wrote his mother, shortly after he was transferred to SF from Ottawa.

After visiting Mr McKinney I went to the library and did some research. A lot of local information about the railway. The story is becoming “Smiths Falls: A Railway Town.” Kind of a social history of railroaders in this eastern Ontario town. I have no idea what Ralph will make of this but I don’t care. I have something to bring back and it is way better than some dull PR copy about a corporate logo.

Wandered the streets again, only this time feeling good. No idea if Ralph will see it my way. He’s so volatile he could interpret it as a failure on my part – failure to even find the logo-train. But I went when I was supposed to go and there was no logo-train in Smiths Falls. The whole town would have been gathered around it. The richness of maple and oak leaves, like being surrounded by a low-banked fire. Hint of rain. Water and rocks. Limestone drowning in crimson ivy, a brick wall, layers of hollowed stump, mash of wood pulp.

**

On to Ottawa. If ever a city was not laid out on a grid it is Ottawa. The streets shape-shift, break off, split, divide and disappear. My map was a little dated and I couldn’t keep up with all the twists and turns. Trying to navigate through Ottawa was like trying to follow plot turns in John Le Carré novel. For one thing, everything is named Carleton or Nepean, and I kept mistaking any number of Nepeans for the actual suburb of Nepean. It was a bit of a shock to end up on the Queensway when I thought I was still on the outskirts of the city.

Spent a good part of the afternoon lost in Ottawa, specifically the Merivale area, which was like a snakes and ladders game. This time I didn't even find the railyards. I did make it to Bank Street where the logo-train was supposed to be, but I either missed it or it had never been there in the first place.

Finally gave up and headed for Kingston to begin my vacation. This trip has been strange and wonderful. I feel as if I've dropped out the world. In a way I've come home, only incognito, as a phantom, as if I died and returned long after anyone I once knew was gone but the place itself looked exactly the same. Those thoughts again. I could just stay here in eastern Ontario, in the Ottawa Valley, not return to Calgary at all. Relieved to find my way out of the Ottawa trap, I took Highway 2 and stopped in Prescott where I saw the ghosts of Sharon and her family.

Stopped at a specialty coffee shop. It looked like a 1960s-style coffee house with macrame hangings, plants tangled in the window, a cat appearing and disappearing from behind a beaded curtain at the back. Yet it was carved out of one of the tall limestone buildings along Highway 2, contrast between stone and folksiness. Long talk with the proprietor, a man in his mid-forties with a greying ponytail. He was a museum restorer and knows Calgary very well. He worked at Heritage Park and used to go to the Rocking Horse Saloon after work. He likes Calgary, said it used to be a tough town. I said I thought it still is, under the corporate veneer. He knows the Merivale area of Ottawa where I got so badly lost. He also knows Barrie. In fact it seemed as if he's lived everywhere in the country. We talked for ages about moving and various jobs.

Down the Thousand Islands Parkway to Kingston! First time I've ever driven it. So beautiful in autumn colours, the water, the rocks, the leaves – the Canadian Shield. It was hard keeping my eyes on the road long enough to make it to Kingston. An elegiac drive, sun set, road ahead washed in a coppery light. Made it to Kingston. After all the day's adventures, all my driving, I just couldn't manage to park the car straight in Marsha and John's driveway. But it was an amazing feeling to pull into their driveway in this rental car.

**

Their house has been on the market for a long time now and the strain is showing. Wonderful to see Marsha, John and Martin though. Marsha had gone to a movie just before I arrived and John went off to tend to Martin. He is very nurturing with Martin. I lay on the green leather couch, looking at the familiar pictures on the wall, listening to their CDs, thinking how I'll likely never see this house again.

Oct. 3

Dinner chez M&J with Deb, whom I haven't seen in a long time. After dinner, Marsha and I walked Deb back to her apartment, through a Kingston park, scuffling through autumn leaves. We said goodbye to Deb then continued on downtown, along the stony streets, through tunnels of leaves, corner depanneurs and coin laundries, the William Street houses with 19th century shutters. I couldn't make conversation, too busy trying not to cry. Not sadness, more that my heart was so full, emotions so mixed. M and J still having problems, F and I still having problems. What happens if you just grow away from someone? Marsha and I went to see a movie Bill (who is now out of the closet) raved about: *In and Out* starring Robert Kline. It was stuffed with clichés about gays.

Oct. 4

Lobster and champagne with Marilyn and Matthew. Their bungalow is literally stuffed with original art. It is also an art gallery. They invite people to tour the living and dining rooms, the hallways, into the bedrooms and down into the basement to see art. It is an unique blend of private home and gallery. Argument about art at dinner, specifically whether artists should be subsidized and why the average artist makes so much less money than an average corporate stooge. I felt rather strange being a corporate stooge at their table. It is such a change from anything I was or stood for.

John was passionately against any form of subsidy for artists and as so many people do, cited *Voices of Fire* as an example. Matthew and I vehemently disagreed with him. Then John pointed at one of the paintings near the dining room table and said he wouldn't pay twenty-five cents for it. Marsha said she wouldn't pay anything for it either because it was disturbing. Marilyn and I said we would pay for it because it was disturbing and that is why we thought it was great art.

Oct. 5

Marsha, John and I had dinner at a British pub. Marsha and I went on to a bar very much like Muldoon's. Returned home and stayed up talking until the wee hours. She turned into her chaplain persona and probed me about Fred. I did talk about the relationship with her but wanted to keep this my trip. I also resist being probed, counselled or coerced. In the soft light she can look totemic. She has a way of using facial expressions to make it look as if she is listening, evaluating, judging, or deep in thought over something that has just been said to her in confidence. Marsha purses her lower lip as she posts an opinion and steers you toward her own agenda re family and relationships.

Oct. 6

Last day in Eastern Ontario. Unbelievable to think of returning to Calgary. I got a parking ticket in Kingston – a well-known tourist trap – and went to city hall to pay it. The woman at the wicket said, "All the way from Calgary." I took me the better part of a minute before realizing she was talking to me! Marsha and I then drove out to Fort Henry and we continued our long timeless walk-and-talk. Finally packed up the rental car and drove off to catch my plane. Couldn't resist a last drive along the Thousand Islands Parkway. I am anal about catching flights and left in plenty of time, had even written out a crib sheet of instructions and so, didn't bargain on getting lost in Ottawa again. Stopped in at a diner for directions and it turned out I was headed in the right direction. I made it just in time.

Flight from Ottawa to Vancouver on Air Canada. The movie was *My Best Friend's Wedding*. Awful. Felt like a rat in a Skinner box at Vancouver airport. Made my connection with BC Air from Vancouver to Calgary. This roundabout way of getting from Ottawa to Calgary was actually cheaper than a straight flight. At least it was according to Rider Travel who arranged it. Go figure. The Vancouver-Calgary flight was downright luxurious compared to Ottawa-Vancouver, chintz-covered seats that made me imagine a flying Agatha Christie parlour.

-30-